



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

FOOD EDITORS

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FISH IS "TURKEY" AT CHRISTMAS

Christmas may mean a turkey dinner with all the trimmings to most Americans, but to many of those whose recent ancestry goes back to foreign lands, fish is "turkey", according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In Scandinavian communities throughout the United States, the proper celebration of the Christmas and New Year holidays includes the serving of "lutefish" in large quantities. Lutefish -- or call it "Lutefisk" or "Norwegian turkey" -- is served as the main dish at community suppers in churches and lodges or in private homes by persons of Norwegian, Swedish, or Danish descent. As traditionally served, lutefish is piled high in quivering white jelly-like flakes, with a covering of melted butter or milk gravy, and garnished with "lingon" berries, a mountain cranberry.

In their native lands, Scandinavians prepare their own lutefish from dried stock fish, which in turn is prepared from various members of the cod family. This is a time-consuming process, requiring careful attention. In this country, however, prepared luterish, usually imported from Norway, can be obtained from grocery stores and delicatessens. This product requires only simple cooking in the home.

Eels, which during most of the year have only a limited sale in the United States, come into their own during the Christmas season, when quantities of them are brought into New York for the Italian-American trade. During the month before Christmas, fishermen from Eastport, Maine to Cristfield, Maryland -- and in some Canadian provinces -- are busy catching eels to supply this holiday market. Each fisherman has a live box in shallow water where the eels can be held alive until needed for market, for only live eels are acceptable for this trade.

The Christmas influx of eels has led to the popular belief that eels are the "Italian turkey", but as a matter of fact they are used as the principal dish of the Christmas Eve supper.

Christmas Eve in many Polish households is celebrated by the eating of carp, while many persons from Germany and other middle European countries cherish carp in "Polish sauce" as a favorite holiday dish. Thousands of carp are fattened for months to be in prime condition for the holiday trade, for, like eels, carp for the Christmas market are sold alive to the customer.

Dry salt cod -- preferably in the form of "Bacalao Biscayenne" -- is likely to form the Christmas Eve supper of people of Spanish descent; octopus cooked in olive oil is used by Greek communities as a favorite dish of the Christmas and New Year season; and red snapper from the Gulf of Mexico is practically indispensable to

Oriental-Americans in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other Pacific Coast communities for the New Year holiday. The red snapper is cooked whole, preserving the colorful skin. A "sweet-sour" sauce surrounds the cooked fish. To other, specially Japanese, a salted salmon is the most acceptable New Year's gift. Frequently it is cut in thin strips and eaten without any other preparation as a tasty relish or appetizer.

Whatever your nationality, for pre-holiday religious fast days and those post-season "tired of turkey days", there will be an abundance of various species of fish and shellfish with which the homemaker may add variety and substantial food value to the table, according to market specialists of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

For those who wish to add an unusual touch to their holiday menus, the Fish and Wildlife Service provides the following directions for preparing some of these dishes:

LUTEFISH

Lutefish can be obtained at some of the better grocery stores in the Middle West and at some delicatessens in the East. The cooking is very simple. Cover the fish with cold water, and bring slowly to a boil, adding a little salt. Boil about 10 minutes and pour off the water. The lutefish should present a white and flaky appearance, breaking into pieces as it is placed on a platter. Served with melted butter, or a milk sauce together with mashed potatoes, dashed with pepper and salt to taste and a garnish of lingon berries, this makes a delectable dish.

FRIED EEL

Prepare eel by removing skin, which is done most readily if eel is immersed in boiling water for about 1 minute. Cut in 1 inch lengths and wipe dry. Dip in beaten egg and roll in sifted break or cracker crumbs. Deep fry in olive oil with a bay leaf and 1 or 2 cloves of garlic at 360° F. When brown remove and drain.

MARINATED EEL

Remove the skin, cut an eel in pieces 1 or 2 inches long. Put in a buttered pan, add one dozen finely chopped shallots, one glass of white wine, and one cupful of fish broth. Cover and boil until done, then place on a platter. Heat one ounce of butter in a saucepan, add a tablespoonful of flour and the broth in which the eel was cooked and boil for five minutes. Bind with the yolks of two eggs and one-half cupful of cream, add a little chopped parsley and pour over the fish. Do not strain the sauce.

BACALAO BISCAYENNE

Take three pounds of salt cod and soak in two gallons of water, changing water 2 or 3 times. The second day reduce the quantity of water to 1 gallon. After soaking two days, remove the cod and allow it to drain. Then cut in one inch squares, dredge in flour, and fry in olive oil. Then arrange in a stew pan, covering with a tomato sauce. Allow to simmer for three quarters of an hour. Then arrange on a platter and serve.

The sauce is as follows:

Chop 3 pounds of fresh tomatoes, preferably the pear shaped California tomato, 2 Spanish onions, 3 cloves of garlic (exact amount depends on size of garlic and on individual taste). Place these ingredients in a kettle with 1 cup of olive oil and a bay leaf. Season with a little freshly ground black pepper, but use no salt. Allow the ingredients to cook slowly until the sauce is thoroughly cooked and well blended. If it is too thick add sufficient water to give the proper consistency. If too thin allow it to simmer until it has evaporated the surplus moisture.

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